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ABSTRACT

American race relations theory is applied to the conceptualization of assimilation in America and to problems in planning in higher education desegregation. Black colleges can be viewed as microcosms of American race relations in their patterns of conflict, accommodation, and assimilation. The conflict over the propriety of black colleges' claims and their continued existence in desegregated society is played out as national policy. Black colleges are expected to accept diminished roles in order to integrate according to the prescribed pattern: a plurality of separate identities is transformed into a colorless, interracial community. Black colleges are caught in the controversial middle ground between desegregation options that purport to advance equality in a racially-disparate society and those necessary for efficiency in a system stressed by duality in a single system--the delivery of higher education in the South. Some conceptualizations suggest that the absorption of blacks into the mainstream of American life would be neither inevitable nor even desirable from the standpoint of the requirements of a democratic and pluralistic society. The fundamental dilemma is whether the positive benefits of the Brown decision become a threat to black cultural and institutional prerogatives/imperatives. (SW)

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A Critique of Race Relations Theory As Applied to Public Policy: The Case of Historically Black Colleges

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Some of the concepts and theoretical conceptualizations in the field of "minority group relations" or, as it has for a long time been called "racial and ethnic relations", are widely employed in discussions of current social problems, including desegregation of public higher education. This inquiry is, in the strictest sense, an analysis of that conceptual realm in race relations theory as it performs the service of link between purely political social planning and actual racial developments.[1] Among the conceptualizations, the elimination of de jure segregation (i.e., assimilation) anticipates the removal of ethnic (black) institutions that for reasons are more ideological than logical or empirical; and, as analytic priorities, are uncritically transmuted from the level of conceptual tools to presumptive grounds for social action. Consequently, there exists a state of discontinuity between ongoing events and the social science which purports to inform and interpret plans for higher education desegregation (the elimination of public black colleges) with other conceptual alternatives (the positive benefits in the continuation of such institutions)[2]

I propose, therefore, in this essay, to train my comments on the manner by which the conceptualization of assimilation in America has been adopted from the sociology of race and ethnic relations. That concentration will illuminate the problematics

1. Harry N. Bash, Sociology, Race and Ethnicity. Gordon and Breach, New York, 1979.

2. John Rawls, A Theory of Justice. Harvard Press. Boston. 1971

of planning in higher education desegration as rooted in the character of a race relations theory which has conceptual biases that compromise the legitimacy and integrity of predominantly black colleges. While the analysis embraces (in broad contextural terms) three of the many forces set in opposition to the continuation of these colleges, I have centered on the impact of race relations theory in sociology on them. A lengthier paper would be required to incorporate the influence of actual race relations praxis (white dominance in America) and the interpenetration of certain socioeconomic exigencies.

The theme of the 1962 meetings of the American Sociological Association, "The Uses of Sociology", reflected the concern of practicioners that the discipline makes its ascendancy in the influence of federal, foundation, and state/local government machinations. Of course, this phase was neither an epiphany nor fortuitous in the development of the field for the earliest treatises in the 'Americanization' of sociology served as scientific justitications and rationalizations for slavery.[3] Since that time, the field of sociology, especially the subdiscipline, race relations, has experienced heated debate over the value-free requirement of (social) science and the contentiousness that arises when theoretical research is applied to on-going social problems.

3. George Fitzhugh. Sociology for the South, A. Morris. Richmond, Virginia. 1854.

No doubt the most acute example of logical/methodological ambiguity, conceptual laxity, and the effect of misappropriated theorizing on the mediating realm of policy making was the case of the black family as reviewed by Moynihan in the 1960s.[4] Of course, this results in considerable skepticism as to the status of sociology as a genuine science since, unlike the natural sciences, the field of sociology lacks clarity when it comes to the connotative and denotative specificity of its conceptual tools.[5] Most simply stated in the context of this paper, the concepts of assimilation, integration, and desegregation (as applied to legal precedents and policy planning in the academic 'procession') are preferred as though there is a perfect congruence between the concepts as subject matter of sociology and the actual substance/dynamics of race relations in American social life. Unfortunately, for the advocates of public black colleges' continued existence, laypersons (and many lawyers and state higher education councils) fuse these as twin categories of cognition and action, forgetting that these concepts are, after all, nothing more than reconstructions of reality, while black colleges are institutionalized properties grounded in the historical psycho-social experiences of black people. What were once 'sociological' concepts have become absorbed into popular parlance then refracted back onto the (real) social

4. Joyce A. Ladner. The Death of White Sociology. Vintage. New York. 1973
5. Ernest Nagel. Logic without Metaphysics. Free Press. Glencoe. 1956.

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world bearing the legitimacy of science.[6]

The overall problems that emerge from an application of (American) race relations theory in the conceptualization and implementation of higher education desegregation are: (1) black colleges come to follow an almost predictable interactive pattern within American higher education--as microcosms of American race relations as the pattern of their collective existence and evolution follows the conflict, accomodation, and assimilative cycle of the theory itself; and (2) at the present stage, desegregation policy (an aspect of the assimilation stage) has been elevated to a position where it is carried out with the obligations associated with a natural social process equivalent to reality-in-and-of-itself (such as the Durkheimian social fact). Put another way, the conflict over the propriety of the black colleges' claims and the continued existence of them--in desegregated society--is played out as national policy. The role of the state becomes, for some, that of "...political instrument created for the continued subordination and exploitation of the vanquished...and for the implementation of their eventual assimilation."[7] The dominant historical pattern of American race relations has influenced desegregation policy in higher education in such a way that there may well have been no other direction for the pattern of its practice to go but to the present one--a scenario that denigrates black colleges as impediments to

6. Abraham Kaplan. The Conduct of Inquiry. Chandler. San Francisco. 1964.

7. Harry N. Bash, Op. Cit., p.30

"natural" social progress. In harnessing these sociological concepts to perform social transformations, i.e., institutional changes, such transfers take on the quality of common-sense tenents of progress emerging from antecedent stages in both the field of sociology and in the social world it interprets and informs.

The works of Burgess and Parks[8] represents the domain assumptions around which most social science (and much of the legal debate) pivots with respect to the question of desegregation in higher education. In no small way, yet in a manner that is not readily apparent to the non-discerning public, the present state of public black colleges is tied to the dominant theory of race relations in the social sciences. This theory, developed around the turn of the century at the University of Chicago, is based on the notion that conflict will characterize the relations between dominant and subordinant (racial) groups until such time that antagonisms are reduced at the institutional level(s).[9] As these institutional/systemic differences are submerged, the personal identities of blacks will be merged (assimilated) into an American milieu that is neither "black" nor "white", but just American; ergo, interracial society is transformed into integrated society, the notion of a plurality of separate identities will be transformed into a (colorless) community of different interests; and, in the case of black

8. Robert E. Park. "Assimilation," Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. Vol.II, New York. Macmillan, 1930,pp.281-283

9. George Simpson. "The Sociology of Race and Ethnic Relations," in R.K. Merton, et.al.,eds. Sociology Today. New York. Basic Books, 1959,pp.376-399.

colleges "...a state's duty is to convert its white and black colleges into just colleges."[10] In this scheme, the desegregation of black public colleges becomes but the extension of the complex process of rearranging important social organizations and institutions in American society. In effect, some black colleges (like the lower level schools before them) will become relatively insignificant in the academic procession and transitory until society "opens" up so that points of conflict between the races are minimized, and the conflicts be (further) reduced at the institutional levels...at personal levels of identity to a society where individual blacks will see themselves in terms that are completely deracialized--i.e., as 'just' Americans. Theoretically, in such an America, race differentation and racial identity would wither away (at the level of political culture) and society would be transformed into a "community of different interests" rather than a "unity of separate identities."[11] Magically, the interracial society becomes integrated society; and, as a precondition--at least in terms of linguistic relativity--the two concepts would become fused.

Since our objective here lies in tracing the influence of sociological concepts on desegregation policy, we can begin to see now how the black colleges are 'expected to conform' (accept diminished roles) in order to integrate with the prescribed pattern. The ultimate step, of course, is the accepted, politicized

10. See wording of Norris v. State Council of Higher Education. 327 F. Supp. 1368,1373, Ed. Va.1971,404 US 908.
11. Reid Luhman and Stuart Gilman. Race and Ethnic Relations. Wadsworth. Belmont, Calif. 1980

practice of desegration policy that relegates any confrontational alternative to the level of pathology. The spirit of laws passed under these assumptions put black colleges on the side of the defendant in the Adams Title VI case.[12] They have become candidates for state-mandated financial reductions in the name of dismantling the dual system. In suggesting that they "be realistic and face up to the fact that they do not conform to the standards of American colleges", Dr. Kenneth B. Clark, a prominent scholar in the social science underpinning of the 1954 Brown decision considers black colleges:[13]

> ...accessories to American racism by being content to provide black students with a second class education which is good encugh for blacks. They continue to imitate blindly the traditicnal rigidities of white colleges...(they) reinforce the racist hypocrisies, the frauds, the normative dishonesties inherent in the designation and present realities of 'black' and 'white' colleges, and 'black' and 'white' education.

In the case of the elementary and secondary sectors, the Court and the American public accepted this view in 1954. Is it not the same course of the Adams litigation? In the elementary and secondary sectors, decisions subsequent to Brown required that de jure segregated schools be dismantled. Students and faculty were reassigned to this end because the courts ruled systematically that there were to be neither 'white' nor 'Negro' schools, but just schools. Following the philosophical and research directions of social science, schools that were racially identifiable (used

12. See "Criteria Specifying the Ingredients of Acceptable Plans to Desegregate State Systems of Higher Education," Federal Register, V.43, No.32, 1978,pp. 6658-6664.

13. Kenneth B. Clark. "The Continuing Struggle to Desegregate US Education," Chronicle of Higher Education, Sept.4,1979.

interchangably with segregated or predominantly black) were presumed to be the incubators of all the social ills attributable to race differentiation; and, with the break-up of them, all of the hoped-for benefits of their anti-thesis would (naturally) follow. At face value interpretation, the "law" of Brown and its progeny (including Adams, of course) appear as the sole manner by which the differences could be reconciled between those on either side of the 'should there be racially identifiable colleges?' question. At a purely theoretical level, it appears that these rulings have a moral life all their own and that blacks would not resist their eventual unfolding since the Civil Rights Movement (catalyzed by blacks) sprang from blacks' yearn to rid themselves of the privations of segregation. Couched as such, Brown and its progeny rendered black schools as part of the problem of the race-based opportunity strictures since race had, by then, been removed as a legally sanctioned barrier in the delivery of equal educational opportunity. All social differentiation between blacks and whites would become part of a general levelling-up process; and, desegregation would become the sole way out of societal inequities grounded in institutional segregation as the desegregated models would beome bridges between/accross racial disparities.

If we now turn our attention back to the field of the sociology of race relations, we can examine other conceptual misgivings that

extend to the analytic incorporation of social science into the realm of realpolitik--higher education desegregation. Equality and education, as concepts enmeshed in social processes and social structure, respectively, are extremely nefarious when applied (as often they are) in the debates over black colleges. Braeza[14] has noted that the term equality has quite perplexing meanings outside metric usage. In philosophical and political circles, the meaning of equality to people (in settings with racial and ethnic variables) is not readily discernable since the qualities and attributes of different groups are not measurable in terms of what makes for equality between them. Thus, "all men are created equal" and "equal educational opportunity" become arguable in their usage as political conceptualizations. Further, he notes:

> Compromises between equality and efficiency solutions are often a matter of social necessity, for even the most equalitarian minded are not indifferent to efficiency. Thus, even if equality were accorded absolute priority in a scheme of values, as between exactly equal solutions, the more efficient would always be (the more) preferable.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that what is fundamentally involved in this quagmire over the place of black colleges in the allocation scheme is the ethnical difference over what is meant by equality in terms political, social, and symbolic.

Related to the conflicting claims and competing ideals over the interpretation of equality as an operationalized concept are

14. Mario Braeza, "Justice in Admissions Procedures to Higher Education," Black Law Journal. Summer, 1974,p.46.

the transmutable objectives of the higher education enterprise itself. More than anything, the public black colleges are caught in the contentious middle ground between desegregation options that purport to advance equality in racially-disperate society and those necessary for efficiency in an economy being drained by duality in a single system--the delivery of higher education in the South. Therefore, any discussion of the ethical, political, and social contradictions involved in the decisions to desegregate these institutions must look first at the purely efficiency considerations. State education councils have to operate from the premise that state-supported facilities be judged as intermediate and not as final goods. This intermediate perspective insists that the overall function of higher education (and thus the worthiness of a particular state institution) is to enhance the workings of the state's productive sector. In this way, that which is 'produced' in a college ought have tangible manifestations in the improved economic life of a state--to advance and not drain--state resources for dollars invested. The attention of economists and advocates of behavioral management objectives is tuned to the satisfaction of an overtaxed population that views education as an investment good; and, the taxpayers understand the empirical articulateness of efficiency models.

The perspective of education as a final good receives much

less attention since it rests on the rather subjective argument that learning is beneficial to society in-and-of-itself and need not be justified in terms of visible returns for dollars invested. Too, the final goods approach to schooling rests on functional efficiency as it would allow for variations from any unified set of established structures in which education might take place and benefit society. However, these notions on which the Rawlesian theory of justice rest are based on a theory of distributive justice. For state legislatures bent to justify the obviously 'anachronistic' and costly features of supporting black and white colleges, two important questions become paramount: (1) What, after all, are the ultimate goals and values of higher education as informed by the recommendations of scientific research and legal holdings? and (2) What particular configuration of state-wide desegregation plans would be most efficient in maximizing the purported goals? The striking and troublesome quality taken on by such plans, as far as pluralism is concerned, is the end result of their tendency to subordinate all things to the maximization of economic goals.[15]

Throughout their collective histories, black public colleges have based arguments for financial support on the rather apologetic idea that "educating blacks, after all, detracted little from the interests of whites"[16]. Mr. Booker T. Washington's entire repertoire was held together by the tenents of the 1895

15. R.D.Heslep, "Rawls and Meritocratic Education," Proceedings. 36th Annual Meetings of the Philosophy of Education Society 1981.

16. Floyd Haynes, "Structures of Dominance and the Political Economy of Higher Education". Occasional Paper No. 3 of Institute for the Study of Educational Policy. Howard University. Washington. 1981.

Compromise Speech--which was generally acceptable to Northern philanthropy and recalcitrant white Southerners. The principle involving the allocation of scarce resources, in this instance, state funds (for higher education) was used in the Southern states in the debates over desegregating higher education. What allocation model of state-supported higher education resources is most efficient in the production of benefits defined in the original goals of desegregation? The claim of this principle was to have a boomerang effect for black institutional life because desegregation models, as generally formulated, do not insure the equality of substantive outcomes when it is noted that "the impact of integration on blacks in racially hostile environments is positively detrimental to them."[17] Thus, the principle embodied in Brown gave rise to a host of decisions in state legislatures in the South which were meant to maximize the goal of educational delivery; but, the resulting dislocations had a negative effect since these decisions could not be made without making some institutions better off and others worse off. Immediately, black higher education institutions were on the defensive for they were face-to-face with the insidious question of: Account for the benefit to the State of the dollars allocated your institution? Such is the core of the efficiency model and the perennial dilemma of any public university's need to justify its budget requests. Black institutions were required

17. Samuel DuBois Cook, "Politics and the Future of Black Colleges," Western Journal of Black Studies. V2, No3 Fall, 1978, pp. 173.

culture. "Opportunity", as the word is used by the liberal sociologists, means "the opportunity to discard one's ethnicity and to partake fully in the American way of life."[20]

In spite of the movement for self-knowledge on the part of members of the third and fourth generation of Southern and Eastern European immigrants in the US, "American students of ethnicity attribute the existence of black society(they identify dual structures) to the dynamics of anti-black prejudice and discrimination rather than (to) the ideological commitment (self-consciousness) of blacks themselves."[21] Glazer and Moynihan succinctly wrote, "It is not possible for Negroes to view themselves as other ethnic groups view themselves because the Negro is only an American and nothing else. He has no culture to guard and protect." Such views, which incidently interpret the black experience in terms of "reaction formation" and "natural social processes" that advance as racism and racist institutions "wither away" in the modern postindustrial state, encourage blacks to pursue an open society—a nonexistent reality that is the premise of racial integration. Cruse notes regarding the crisis that "the three major power groups—Protestants, Catholics, and Jews—neither want nor need to become integrated with each other."[22] For him and for other proponents of democratic cultural pluralism there is no great homogenized, interassimilated (white) America but rather an America in which individual primary social parti-

20. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot. Cambridge. MIT Press. 1963.

21. Ibid., P. 121.

22. Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual. New York. Morrow and Company. 1967.

cipation remains limited, at least in part, by ethnic boundaries and proprieties. This view of the US--enveloping black colleges as permanent features--can be described as "structurally pluralistic along ethnic, racial, and political lines." If the conceptualizations were to assume this line of thought, the absorption of blacks into the mainstream of American life would be neither inevitable nor even desirable from the standpoint of the requirements of a democratic and pluralistic society. Accordingly, unified and visible black institutional formats and the idea of coherent black communities with a sense of legitimacy becomes no more un-American than is the idea of a community of some other American (ethnic) minority.

However, plans for "unitary, non-racial educational systems" in the South tend to ignore this conceptualization of an American pluralistic democracy. A unitary, non-racial system of higher education is inextricably bound to the conflicting perceptions of what constitutes (equality or efficiency) definitions of American democracy. Henderson[23] has rebuked this efficiency approach in the following way:

> True democracy in this country will not result from elimination of Black institutions, be they banks, insurance companies, churches or schools. It will result from recognition of the worth of these institutions and their contribution to society, regardless of factors associated with their historic clientele.

From this point of view of competing claims for scarce resources

23. Vivian T. Henderson, "Unique Problems of Black Colleges," Liberal Education. October, 1970.

and the divergent conceptualizations of equality in democratic society, the present quandry of black public colleges is a logical outcome given the recent chronology of foreign and domestic events. One major point is the manner in which 'racially-identifiable' has come be redefined in the context of affirmative, as opposed to, passive interpretations of the Brown decision. Blake's reference below is typical of the way black college advocates argued:[24]

> "...Racially identifiable really means what? I don't believe there are any non-racially identifiable institutions in America. That's just a myth. To say that an institution that is historically White is not racially identifiable and an institution that is historically Black is racially identifiable is another form of racism to me. It says that an institution that has substantial numbers of Blacks in it is somehow bad and an institution that has substantial numbers of Whites in it is somehow good.

Philosophers of education and educational researchers have found that educational outcomes, as well as race-based antagonisms, have not diminished in proportion to school desegregation.[25] And, advocates argue further that the desegregation of black colleges has amounted, in political terms, to the relinquishment of an institutionalized power base. Beyond all this is the fundamental dilemma: Do the positive benefits of Brown (and its assimilationist bent) become a threat to black cultural

24. Elias Blake, taped interview. "Options in Education," on National Public Radio. April 17,1977.

25. Alton Hornsby, "Black Colleges in the US," Western Journal of Black Studies. V2 No3, Fall, 1978, pp.162166

and institutional perogatives/imperatives? The positive benefit of Brown ignored in its theoretical equation the terms by which racially and ethnically divergent groups in society might be accorded equal perogatives in a system of values where what is efficient is not necessarity perceived as having equal benefits to all groups in society. One legal dissident, Howard Moore[26] debates for those who would argue that the Brown reading proceeded from essentially the same (racist) premise of Plessey v. Ferguson, i.e., black children could only receive quality instruction in association with whites:

> "Racism and reform are not mutually exclusive. In the US situation, racism and reform are intertwined in an extremely complicated and important way. The Court in 1954 created a major revision or reform of American jurisprudence on questions of race. Brown modernized the racist ideology of White supremacy. Under the guise of integration, a legal basis was created for the relaxation and adjustment of racial practices with respect to public education ...The fault of Brown is the same as that found in Dred Scott and Plessey v. Ferguson. Each of these decisions assumes that Whites are racially superior to Blacks. Brown accepts without questioning White domination of institutional life in the Nation. The measure of justice under Brown as it was under Plessey is the equal treatment of Blacks on the basis of White standards and values and not Black ones.

Conclusions and Interpretation

The crucial point in looking at the latent, and for some, the dysfunctional consequences of incorporating referents from the conceptual realm into the policy arena of higher education

26. See position paper of the Black Mississipians Council of Higher Education filed in Ayers v Waller. Jackson, Miss. July 20, 1975.

desegregation is grounded in the need to reconceptualize the traditional constructions of (social) reality. For example, the presumed "deprivation and lasting negative effects" of blacks attending predominantly black schools has never been clearly articulated in the context of the economic disparities. It has, rather, been tied to the "inherent inequality" attributed to black institutions. Perhaps it was the ideational bases of race relations theory, contaminated by its Anglo-conformity biases, that led the Court in 1954 to accept the arguement that, "teachers and supervisors (in predominantly--segregated--black schools) not only accept these negative conditions as inevitable, but also reflect them and make excuses for their perpetuation. Consequently, these conditions culminate in the accumulation of academic retardation of students required to attend."[27] In order to be emancipated from the confines of this type of conceptualizing black people and their institutions, Butterfield's[28] radical logical reconstruction and Kuhn's[29] scientific revolution may put theory back in line with the prevailing conditions and values in the (black) social world. It would require a re-examination where "men not only solve a problem but have to alter their mentality in the process, or at least discover afterwards that the solution involves a change in their mental approach."[30]

27. Kenneth Clark, Op.Cit., P.64
28. Herbert Butterfield, The Origins of Modern Science. New York. Macmillian, 1961.
29. Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions Chicago:Univ. of Chicago Press. 1962.
30. Butterfield, Op.Cit., P.207.

This shift, as applied to the value of scientific conceptualizing on the future of black public colleges, would entail a way by which social policy would be favored by a science of society in which assimilation is not merely celebrated as some "reigning principle", but rather, is postulated as a competing conceptual tool along with the growing body of dynamic social (and sociological) developments.

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